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ABSTRACT

Limited resources and competing demands are forcing statewide planners and decisionmakers to become increasingly concerned with program approval and review. One new element is the review of existing programs as states find it necessary to consider program additions in concert with program terminations. The prospect of declining or stable enrollments, and increased public demand that higher education be held accountable for meeting its objectives, has added further to the importance of program review. Initiation of graduate programs is of special concern. The recent experiences of states provides the context for this discussion. What criteria are being used for program approval and review? Who is conducting the reviews? What is the link between this evaluation and budget allocation? What constraints have past decisions placed on today's planners? A brief bibliography is included. (Author/MSE)

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Planning for Statewide Program Approval and Review

Limited resources and competing demands are forcing statewide planners and decision makers to become increasingly concerned with program approval and review. One new element is the review of existing programs as states find it necessary to consider program additions in concert with program terminations. The prospect of declining or stable enrollments, and increased public demand that higher education be held accountable for meeting its objectives has added further to the importance of program review.

The recent experiences of states provides the context of this discussion. What criteria are being used for program approval and review? Who is conducting the reviews? What is the link between this evaluation and budget allocation? What constraints have past decisions placed on today's planners?

Program Approval

Among the most important decisions facing state higher education agencies are those involving the approval of new programs. Because of their high cost and the length of time from development to the production of the first degree, initiation of new graduate programs is especially critical.

One of the major thrusts of higher education in the South during the past thirty years has been to increase the quality and quantity of graduate education. Resources were added at an even faster pace than that witnessed at the national level. As a consequence, programs and institutions of regional and national distinction were developed. By the mid 1970's, the structure of higher education in the South closely resembled the nation's. Doctoral degree production in the South grew steadily from 9 percent of all doctorates in 1950 to 22 percent in 1975. In the past, this has been due to a faster yearly rate of growth in the South. But in recent years, because of the poor job market, national production has actually begun to decline, while the number of doctorates awarded in Southern institutions has continued to increase from year to year. (See Figure 1)

Today, Southern states face a different problem. Program proliferation threatens the quality of existing programs and may aggravate the already oversupplied Ph.D. market. During the past six years, 122 new doctoral programs have been initiated in the South. (See Figure 2) More than one of every six of those programs was in education, another sixth in engineering.

While there has been a small reduction in recent years in the number of doctoral programs approved in the region (the 1975 and 1976 totals were 15 compared to an average of 20 per year over the past six years), states are under considerable pressure to initiate new programs. Texas had 17 doctoral and 63 master's proposals pending action at the beginning of the year. Florida and Kentucky have just ended long-standing moratoriums on doctoral programs.

In recent years some states have moved away from the development of a "master plan" to an ongoing process of planning. The process of approval for new programs has become lengthier and more involved in terms of participants and analysis. Some states are now requiring letters of intent in advance of program proposals; and in an effort to stem proliferation, others have declared moratoriums. Outside consultants are often employed to evaluate requests for new programs, and public hearings are used to provide additional input.

Program proposals now include information and analysis of a number of pertinent factors. In Florida, for example, analyses include examining the goals and objectives of the program and closeness of fit with current offerings; projections of the need for the program, in-

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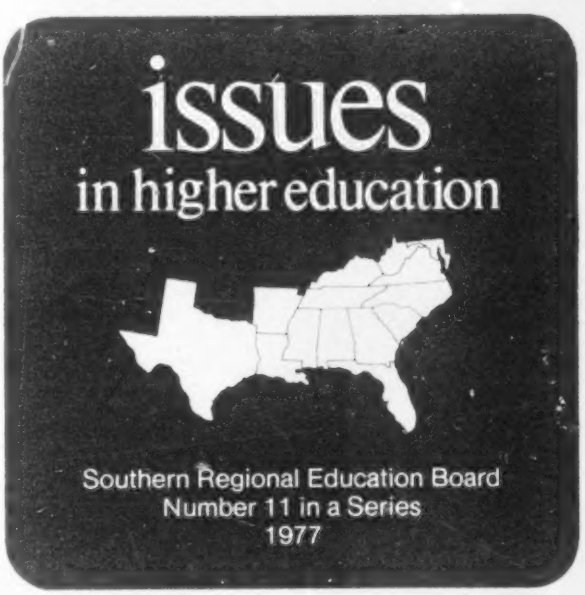


cluding possible employment opportunities for graduates; the availability of the program elsewhere in the state and region; estimates of the resources which are currently available or will be needed when the program is added; and projections of the size of the program in terms of enrollment, student credit hours, and graduates.

The regional dimension is also an important consideration in academic planning, and a number of SREB programs and information services have been designed to assist states in this aspect. The Contract-for-Services program in professional areas and the Academic Common Market for graduate study offer alternatives to establishing new programs in specialized and high cost programs. An SREB program status information service, a doctoral information exchange, degree output reports and periodic program inventories conducted by SREB are also useful to states in assessing the availability and need of programs in the region.

Ideally, only programs which closely fit the existing role and mission of the institution and for which clear need is demonstrated would be approved. But the system operates at less than perfection—general statements of institutional mission allow for different interpretations of the appropriateness of a new program. Estimates of future enrollments and the need for graduates are often inaccurate.

Role and mission statements, which are usually the starting point for academic planning, have been a part of the process for many years. The broadness of the terms employed, however, has allowed for a multitude of sins. Comprehensive doctoral granting institutions, in aspiring to gain national reputation, have resisted any limitation of their role and scope. Pressure from state colleges has led to the development of several "major" state universities in states which have had difficulty in supporting one. Newer urban institutions battle to add prestigious graduate programs which often stretch to the limit the definition of "urban" mission. Community colleges find their territory encroached upon by four-year institutions offering associate degrees, and in turn, duplicate the efforts of vocational-technical schools and proprietary institutions.

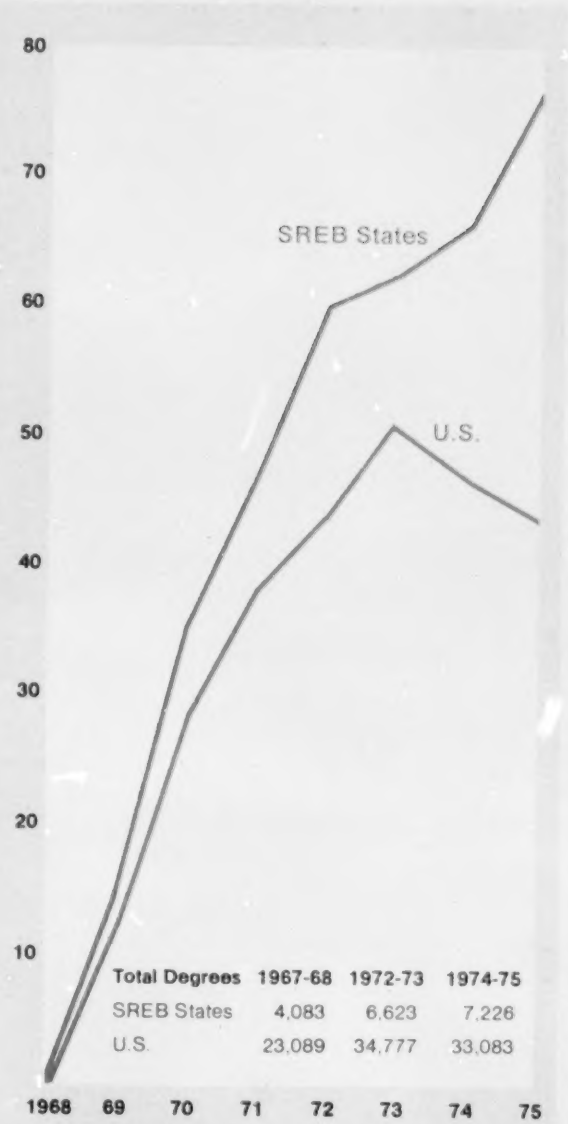
State agency officials also find that one of the most difficult problems is dealing with program requests where resources are already in place. In many instances, while the state agency has authority to approve programs, addition of individual courses is still the institutional prerogative. "Phantom" programs grow through the addition of courses and faculty in areas tangential to existing programs. Program requests which show little immediate need for additional resources are difficult to disapprove, regardless of other criteria, such as need or appropriateness of institutional mission or avoidance of duplication.

Academic planning sometimes avoids other important issues. Spaces in private higher education have gone begging, while public higher education demands expansion. Proprietary education continues to operate somewhat

Figure 1

Percent Change in Doctoral Degree Production, SREB States and the U.S.

(Base Year, 1967-68 = 0)



Total Degrees	1967-68	1972-73	1974-75
SREB States	4,083	6,623	7,226
U.S.	23,089	34,777	33,083

Using 1967-68 as a base year, this graph illustrates the growth in yearly Ph.D. production for SREB states and the United States. In 1974-75, 7,226 doctoral degrees were granted in the South, a 77 percent increase over 1967-68 levels. This rate of growth was substantially greater than for the nation as a whole. In fact, for the past two years, while production in the SREB states has continued to increase, national levels have begun to decline.

beyond the pale, with its enrollment, offerings and graduates a mystery to public policy makers. Institutions of all types scramble for the new adult markets, and off-campus programs of dubious quality proliferate in no rational manner. All this means less than effective use of the increasingly scarce state resources for postsecondary education.

How specific should academic planning be? While specific plans provide hard criteria by which to judge future program proposals, they are often politically unviable. State agencies are more likely to pick carefully the issues on which to take a stand, hoping for limited success, rather than risking total failure. Specificity can also introduce a rigidity which may prevent effective response to changing needs. Institutions argue that the planning approach can stifle experimentation and quick response to new student interests and emerging research needs. The strongest objections, however, are related to questions of institutional autonomy versus central control. State officials, on the other hand, are skeptical that institutions have the will to generate self reform.

Specific plans are more likely to be found in consolidated systems and central governing/coordinating agencies. In the University of Missouri system, existing and proposed programs are listed in five categories: primary candidates for development, secondary candidates for development, programs to be continued at present levels, candidates for reduction, and those to be terminated. In addition to setting priorities, such an approach combines program approval with review of existing programs, a practice which is still uncommon.

The University of Illinois categorizes new programs as approved, under review and "contemplated." This last category is a cooling-off spot for difficult decisions. The California State University and College system lists proposed degree programs according to projected dates of initiation over the next five years. In practice anything "to the right of the line" is up for negotiation according to changing student demands, enrollment trends, etc.

At the University of North Carolina, the long-range plan published for the 1976-1981 period indicates the specific programs and degree levels currently authorized at each institution in the system, and those areas approved or disapproved for planning during the period.

In Kentucky, the role and mission statements being developed will provide a broader rationale for determining future program requests and conducting program review. A registry of programs authorized for funding will be developed and will provide a format for decisions about existing programs.

The Maryland Board of Higher Education, now developing a new master plan including role and scope statements, will use the process to confront some broader issues, such as the appropriate roles for segments and institutions as to sources of student clientele, types of students, level of program offerings and research and public service functions.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission in cooperation with institutions has begun to tie approval of some programs to specific criteria for future program review. In recently approving a master's program in Criminal Justice at the University of Tennessee—Chattanooga, the Commission accepted the program with mutually agreed upon conditions, namely that the institution agree to terminate the program after five years if performance does not meet specific criteria for degree production, employment of graduates, and cost effectiveness.

Review of Existing Programs

The implication of limited resources means that academic planning must include the review of existing programs for the dual purposes of developing quality programs and termination of ineffective and unproductive programs. While program review is relatively new to state agencies (and where termination is an issue, sometimes beyond their power), it is not new to institutions. John Folger (former Executive Director of the Tennessee Commission) notes that reviews in the past have had different functions. Departmental and institutional reviews have generally been aimed at program development and expansion, while accreditation reviews have sought to detect malfunctions and maintain minimal standards. The purpose of state agency reviews has been principally to assure institutional accountability and the elimination of duplication. This implies that programs will be terminated as well as developed—something institutions have generally been unwilling to do themselves.

Program review is an expensive process, however, and a review of all degree programs in the state is a substantial undertaking. In order to limit review, some states use quantitative tripwires to signal qualitative review of programs, while others have concentrated on programs at the doctoral level only. The Education Commission of the States has suggested ten criteria for use in the review process. (See Table 1)

Virginia uses quantitative measures to signal further review. During one year the community colleges are examined, the following year the senior colleges. The first tripwire is degree productivity over the last five years. If program output falls below an agreed-upon standard, then enrollment is examined. If the program does not meet the enrollment criteria, a qualitative review of the program is initiated.

The Louisiana Board of Regents has completed half of a program review process which will eventually cover all doctoral programs in the state. Thus far 18 doctoral programs have been terminated. The Board also awarded seven programs a "commendation of excellence" and recommended that 38 programs be "maintained and strengthened." The process included the submission of lengthy self-evaluation forms by each of the institutions and on-site visits by outside consultants. All 18 of the

terminated doctoral programs were duplicated in some other state institution.

The State University System of Florida has taken a comprehensive approach to program review in choosing to review programs area by area, across all levels. Criteria for evaluation include program quality, priority of the program within the institution and within the system, articulation with other programs, program administration and management, and career implications—including manpower needs. The first programs evaluated were in the areas of education and engineering. The reviews resulted in placing limits on undergraduate education enrollments (although no programs were eliminated) and the substitution of a consortium arrangement in place of a proposed new engineering school.

Campus autonomy is certainly more of an issue when state agencies recommend termination than when they deny permission for a new program. And the powers of state agencies vary widely. Governing boards can presumably terminate what they initiate, while the coordinating boards differ in their regulatory powers. The terminations in Louisiana were made by a state board whose establishment is constitutionally mandated rather than a creation of the legislature.

Robert Berdahl, who has written extensively on statewide coordination, notes that the costs of program review can be great and, in the short run, the direct cost savings rather small. Faculty are merely transferred to related degree programs. In the long run, however, attrition should result in substantial reductions. The guidelines for the Louisiana review provided that no institution would suffer a loss of funds for five years after the program was terminated. In Virginia, the only direct budget savings which have resulted from program terminations have been in library budgets, which are directly related to the number and kind of programs in the institution.

Table 1

Criteria Suggested for Program Review—Education Commission of the States

1. The number of graduates from the program in each of the last five years.
2. The number of students enrolled in the program (entry and dropout rates).
3. The size of classes and the cost of courses identified as integral elements in the program.
4. Cost per program graduate.
5. Faculty work load.
6. Program quality as reflected by its regional or national reputation, faculty qualifications and the level of position achieved by graduates of the program.
7. Total production of a program's graduates from all institutions in the state, region and/or nation.
8. The economies and improvements in quality to be achieved by consolidation and/or elimination of the program.
9. General student interest and demand trends for the program.
10. The appropriateness of the program to a changed institutional role or mission.

Source: Education Commission of the States, *Coordination or Chaos?* Report Number 43, October 1973.

Legislative Audits

Legislative involvement in evaluation has also increased. Numerous states have extended the functions of legislative audit staffs beyond questions of fiscal management to selective in-depth studies which stress the evaluation of outcomes. In other states legislative committees have taken on the task. There is now a section of the National Conference of State Legislatures concerned with legislative program evaluation (LPE) and a clearinghouse for information on the subject at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

In 1975, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission of the Virginia General Assembly completed a far-ranging evaluation of the Virginia Community College System and made a number of recommendations in the area of curriculum, faculty productivity and articulation with other sectors of higher education.

In January 1976, at a meeting of the Legislative Advisory Council of SREB, Marshall Harris, a member of the Florida Board of Regents and former Florida legislator, discussed the similar concept of legislative oversight. He urged legislators to become more involved in policy making rather than piecemeal legislation and, through the professional staffs of legislative committees, to select a limited number of substantive issues to examine during the off season. This process would force legislators to be more specific about the goals of legislation and to insure that recipients of state funds were held accountable.

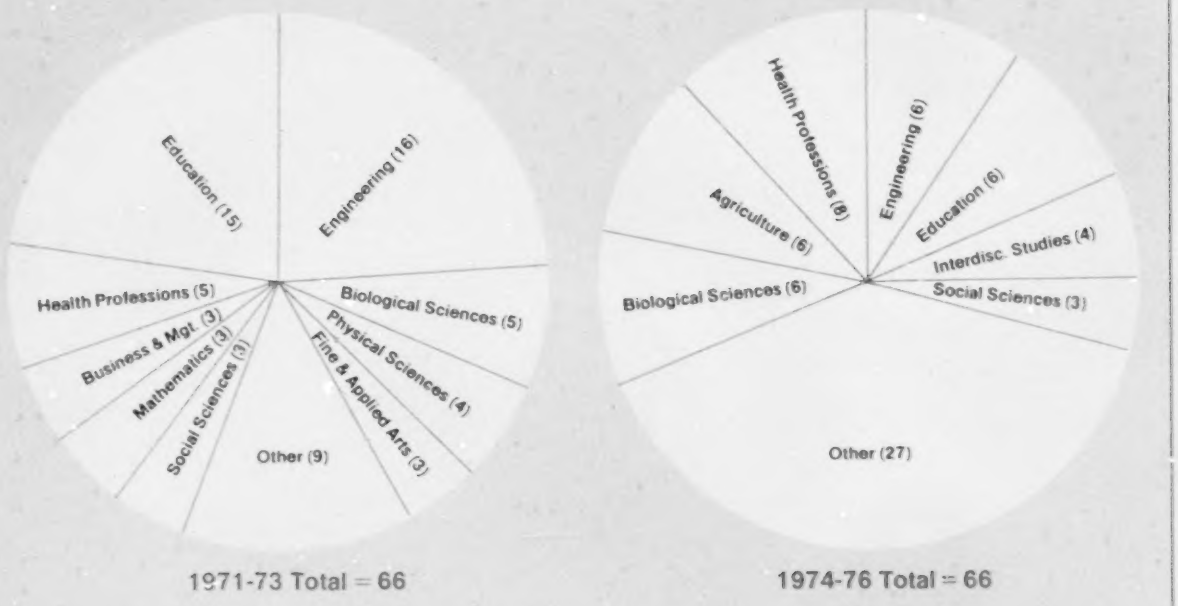
Audit staffs are finding, however, that legislative intent is often illusive. Even when the performance of the system can be measured, policy makers—state officials, institutional leaders and legislators—often disagree over conclusions to be drawn.

Performance and the Budget

While program review and evaluation have concentrated on assessing the performance of higher education, the link between this process and budgeting is weak. Traditional enrollment-based funding mechanisms may

Figure 2

New Doctoral Programs in the South
1971-73 and 1974-76



During the past six years, 122 new doctoral programs have been initiated in the South. While the 1971-73 period was dominated by new programs in education and engineering, there has been a wider diversity in recent years. Programs in the health professions were the most prevalent in the 1974-76 period with agriculture initiations increasing dramatically.

provide institutions their "equal" share, but they offer little incentive for either efficiency or effectiveness. Rather than encouraging change, they tend to confirm existing patterns of activities and current cost levels. A California study found, for example, that enrollment-based funding tended to prolong the time of completion of graduate degrees as institutions held on to students as long as possible to maintain funding. While performance assessment may never replace enrollment-driven formulas completely, it can provide a mechanism for setting general budgetary priorities and assuring accountability. It can also serve as a way of funding and evaluating innovative programs which do not employ the traditional method of enrollment through credit hour production.

The Tennessee Higher Education Commission is currently conducting a three-year project to explore ways in which state funding might promote effectiveness and efficiency. Its performance funding project is exploring the feasibility of allocating some portion of state funds to reflect how well programs are meeting objectives. Performance funding is viewed as an addition to the enrollment driven formula, which would continue to provide the base support for institutions. Tennessee institutions are being asked to establish objectives and then develop measurable indicators. The indices can then be weighted and some bases of comparison developed—either the average score of similar institutions or the performance of a single institution over time.

The University of Hawaii has agreed to be evaluated on six performance measures, but the measures are not yet being used in budget allocation due to problems in collection of the data. The measures include the average score of the graduating class on the Graduate Record Examination, the number of graduates who began their program not more than five years previously, and indicators of the value and worth of the educational experience to graduates.

Whether or not performance measures can be directly

related to budget decisions, their development can do much to increase the credibility of higher education. Despite the difficulty of measurement there is growing consensus that some indication of performance is better than none at all.

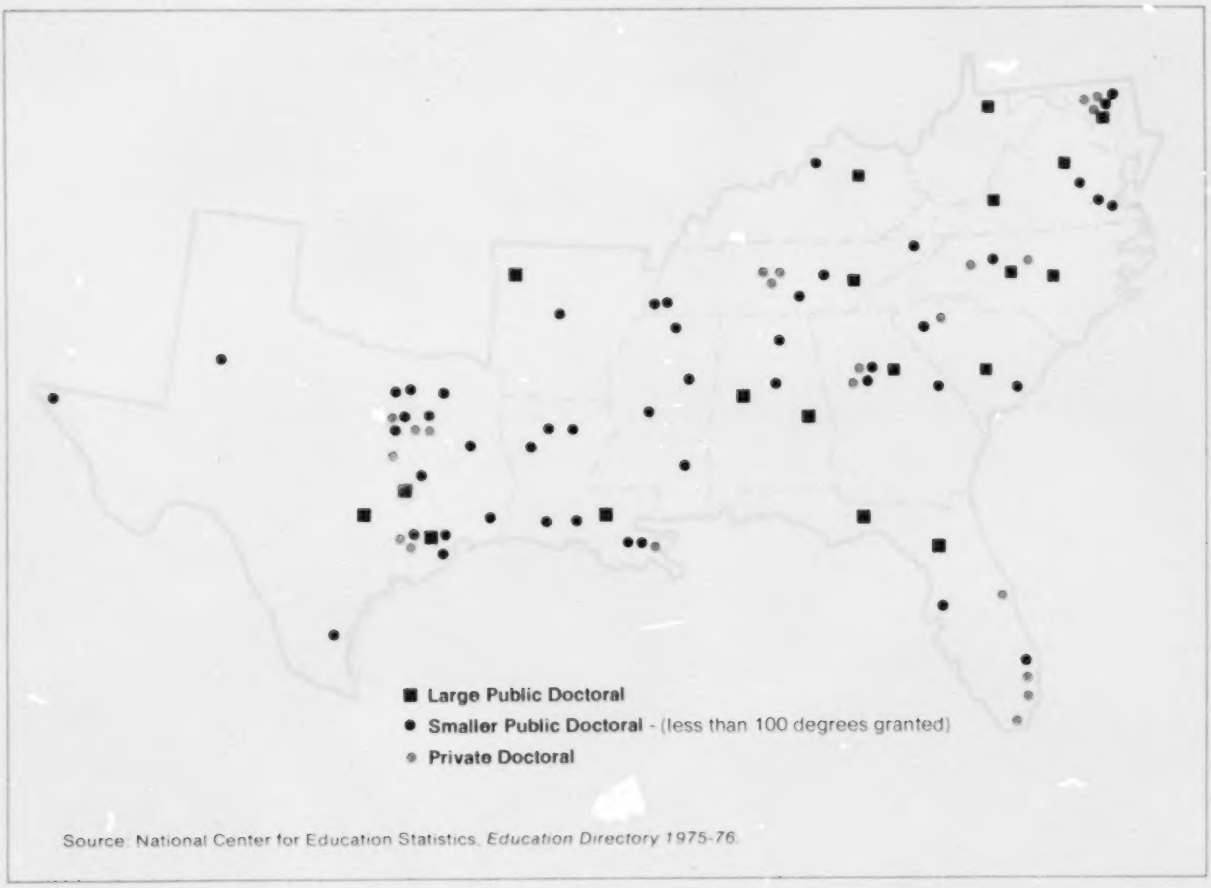
The use of incentive grants is another approach to resource allocation which focuses on performance. It has been used in a variety of ways to combat the disincentives for change in other allocation procedures. The assumption is that improvements can be brought about best through the stimulation of local initiative rather than centralized control. Incentive grants, of course, have a long history in the allocation of dollars from the federal government and from foundations. Funds are distributed on a project basis through open competition, with dollars linked to ideas rather than enrollment. Currently, twenty states use the approach in some limited form. In the region, state incentive grant programs are in operation in Florida, Kentucky, and North Carolina. They have also been used in the past in Arkansas and Texas.

Constraints of the Past

Academic planning is inexorably tied to past planning (or nonplanning) decisions. Planners must start with the existing physical plant, faculty complement, and ongoing programs. The difficulty of directing students from an overutilized campus facility to an underutilized one is well illustrated by Lee and Bowen in their discussion of the University of California system. They report that freshman applicants redirected from Berkeley and UCLA "fail to show up" at the smog-ridden Riverside campus. The state, meanwhile, is reluctant to authorize additional facilities at San Diego and Irvine where there is demand, while space goes unused at Riverside.

Figure 3

Doctoral Granting Institutions in the South
1977



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Education Directory 1975-76*.

Many states have overbuilt in one geographic area or in a certain type of institution. While there may be adequate campuses and programs statewide, there are local and regional needs which are unmet. Sometimes this is due to unexpected population shifts, but more often than not it reflects the consideration of political trade-offs rather than the analysis of population projections and statewide needs at the time decisions were made to locate campuses and programs.

Dual Systems

The existing structure of higher education is a powerful constraint on planning in states where effects of an historic dual structure based on race remain. States under court order to desegregate are aware of how complex and intractable this issue can be.

A major goal of desegregation has been to increase other race enrollment in predominantly white and traditionally black institutions. One approach has been the assignment of new academic programs to black institutions in order to increase their attractiveness to whites. But this often calls for the elimination of similar programs in nearby white institutions. Merger is another option which has been considered when resources are limited or the prospect of achieving integration through other means is slight. While efficiency might dictate merger, institutions have resisted such moves. The traditionally black schools fear the loss of identity and argue forcefully that they serve as powerful role models for blacks; furthermore, supporters say, they deserve a better fate for having served the needs of the black population when other doors were closed. White institutions have been equally adament about being taken over by neighboring black institutions.

Such attitudes often mean that even measures short of merger, such as joint programs, are resisted. There have been some efforts, however—among them, the joint graduate programs at Norfolk State and Old Dominion Universities in Virginia, and at Savannah State and Armstrong State in Georgia. In recent months, North Carolina A&T and UNC-Greensboro have initiated an agreement to build and operate jointly an astronomical observatory.

Planning in this context is difficult and states have found it hard to deal with this issue in the normal planning process. Because of the sensitive political and legal questions involved and the reluctance of states to respond other than to court mandate, planning for desegregation is often conducted separately from other academic planning.

Personnel

One of the most complex and difficult problems facing institutions and state planners is the constraint imposed by personnel policies. Planning and evaluation can identify the kinds of new programs needed and the necessity for eliminating others, but adjusting the current faculty complement to these changes can be a painful and, in some cases, an impossible task. Programs in need of phasing out due to declining enrollments, duplication or low quality are often staffed by a large percentage of tenured faculty. Retraining of specialized faculty to staff new programs is often not a realistic solution. This lack of flexibility usually means low productivity and rising costs.

How can this problem be solved? Placing quotas on the number of tenured faculty and substitution of renewable contracts for tenure or the early retirement of faculty have been suggested. Richard Atkinson, acting director of the National Science Foundation, believes that the absence of young scientists and engineers from college faculties is a threat to scientific research. He has suggested ways in which the federal government might assist institutions in encouraging older faculty to embark on second careers or to directly support older scholars so that institutions might hire younger faculty.

A first step toward any solution is for institutions and states to closely examine these personnel policies. The University of Southern California has developed a computer-based simulation model that provides detailed projections of faculty characteristics. The effect of various policy changes can then be seen—for example, the impact of changing the length of the probation period or altering other promotion policies.

States which have undergone financial crises and retrenchment of faculty have been caught completely without guidelines for laying off or terminating staff. Frank Bowen and Lyman Glenny in their study of financial stringency noted that policies have literally been formulated in the "wee hours of the morning." Even in those states which have weathered one such crisis, there has been a reluctance to confront this issue once the period has passed. In the case of Florida, collective bargaining (which followed shortly after the retrenchment crisis) will be the process for reaching these decisions.

Making Tough Decisions

There continues to be serious disagreement over the proper approach to planning. While specific plans may reduce institutional flexibility, they do promise to result in a rational division of labor and the development of necessary priorities. They may generate political conflict in the short run, but once agreed upon, provide hard criteria for action on future program proposals.

Many states have been unable to develop specific plans without centralized control. Others have found it possible to develop specific and coordinated roles and missions through coordinating agencies and in cooperation with autonomous institutions.

For sure, review of existing programs is becoming a necessary ingredient of effective planning. Setting priori-

ties means both developing quality programs and terminating ineffective and unproductive ones.

But institutions are limited in their ability to change. Faculty are not easily moved from under-enrolled programs to those in demand. States and institutions have been reluctant to develop policies and procedures for the layoff, relocation, retraining, and termination of staff. Questions of the impact of faculty tenure and aging also need close examination.

Planning is essentially a process of information gathering and analysis. But it is done within a political context, and both state and institutional planners will continue to weigh the costs of policy positions against their evaluation of the potential for acceptance. In some cases excellent planning has been poorly implemented for lack of forceful leadership. To paraphrase economist Kenneth Boulding, decisions, not plans, move the world into the future.

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